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## Guatemala

**Post:** Guatemala

### After 20+ years, the Rural Extension Service Returns to Guatemala

**Report Categories:**

Agriculture in the News

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**Report Highlights:**

Guatemala eliminated its rural extension service in 1989. In 2013, the Ministry of Agriculture formally launched a new rural extension service, “Sistema Nacional de Extensión Rural” (SNER). SNER has gone through a redesign and as of 2014, established 334 extension offices nationwide, hiring more than 900 agents. USDA was the first international cooperator and donor to foresee the importance of supporting the Ministry of Agriculture’s efforts to address agricultural productivity in the rural areas. Partnered with Counterpart International, USDA granted a \$5 million, 3-year (2012-2015) Food for Progress award to support SNER in 93 municipalities. USDA has endorsed two cohorts (a total of 160 graduates) from the Extension Service Certification Program implemented by Counterpart International, bringing together local universities and U.S. professors. Indigenous Guatemalan farmers are obtaining access to agricultural knowledge within a systematic approach; rural development is now a possibility.

**General Information:**

Guatemala relies on agriculture as one of its most important sources of income for rural families. Despite agriculture representing 10 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP), the rural extension service was eliminated in 1989. In 2013, the Guatemalan Ministry of Agriculture, under new leadership, formally launched a new rural extension system “Sistema Nacional de Extensión Rural” (SNER). SNER faced a redesign of its structure and as of 2014, has established 334 extension offices nationwide, hiring more than 900 extension agents.

Revamping such a critical development tool is a major task that requires support from all stakeholders. USDA was the first international donor to foresee the importance of supporting the Ministry of Agriculture’s efforts to address agricultural productivity in rural areas. Partnered with Counterpart International (a non-profit international development organization), USDA granted a \$5 million 3-year (2012-2015) Food for Progress award to support SNER in 93 municipalities (out of 114 municipalities). These municipalities are prioritized under the Government of Guatemala’s Zero Hunger Program to address chronic malnutrition and poverty. The 114 municipalities comprise the Departments of Quetzaltenango, Quiché, Totonicapán, San Marcos, and Huehuetenango, all within the U.S. Feed the Future initiative zone of influence.

**Photo 1.**



Henry Schmick, USDA Agricultural Counselor in Guatemala (center left), together with Elmer López, Minister of Agriculture, launch the “Certificate Program on Rural Extension”. Vice Minister Carlos Anzueto (back) and Counterpart Country Director, Maria Esther Bucaro. Source: USDA, 2013

## **Revamping Agricultural Extension in Guatemala**

USDA's support to Guatemala's rural extension system through Counterpart International comprises: 1) Capacity building for agricultural extension agents/services, 2) Capacity building to strengthen agricultural cooperatives, and 3) Financial services tailored for agricultural cooperatives. Items 2 and 3 provide support to enhance the sustainability of already existing cooperatives. Capacity building for agricultural extension agents is obviously the most challenging, considering that the extension service in Guatemala was nonexistent over the past 20 years.

Counterpart International with SNER and San Carlos National University designed a Certificate Program in Rural Extension. The program's curricula contain the following thematic subjects: Institutional Strategy, Methodologies, Production Technology and Environment, Socio-Economic Aspects, and Food Security and Nutrition. The curricula encompasses an 8-month training period, equivalent to 160 hours, of which 80 hours are filled by one week of classes (every two months) and the other 80 hours represent field assignments and tasks. The trainings are carried out by both national as U.S. professors from various collaborating universities, including Michigan State University and the University of California, Davis.

### **Photo 2.**



The first cohort of graduates from the "Certificate Program on Rural Extension" (Huehuetenango, Guatemala, 2014). Source: USDA, 2014

USDA's support to SNER also includes strengthening the Rural Development Learning Centers (CADERs). CADERs are training centers comprised of organized community members that are coordinated by rural agricultural promoters. The rural agricultural promoter is a community member who has demonstrated leadership in guiding rural development, and serves as a liaison between the



community and the extension agents. This promoter coordinates a demonstration field plot where technology transfer can be delivered within a participative and educational methodology. Presently, Counterpart International is supporting several CADERs via applicable and affordable technologies such as seed inputs, irrigation, and adequate integrated pest management. The CADERs also represent a mechanism to address food security both in terms of increasing agricultural productivity to produce a more diversified array of crops.

A CADER supported by USDA and Counterpart International at Malacatancito Municipality in San Marcos, at the Western Highlands in Guatemala, was highlighted during the 2014 CARE's Learning Tour to Guatemala April 21-25, 2014. FAS Administrator Phil Karsting participated in the tour. While interacting with the CADER, Administrator Karsting witnessed USDA's food aid support to Guatemala.

**Photo 3.**



CARE's Learning Tour to Guatemala: Visiting a CADER supported by USDA and Counterpart (Malacatancito, San Marcos, Guatemala, 2014) Source: CARE, 2014

**Program Sustainability**

The Rural Extension Certificate Program is being transferred to San Carlos National University, to be established as a permanent undergraduate or graduate program to sustain long-term extension agents in Guatemala. While many of the first professors of the extension capacity building component were from U.S. land grant universities, for the second cohort graduation on December 16, 2014, were professors from the Faculty of Agriculture at San Carlos University.

**Photo 4.**



Graduate receiving Certificate in Rural Extension.  
(San Carlos National University, Guatemala, 2014). Source: USDA, 2014

### **The Road Ahead**

Despite a good first year of lessons learned and successes story of USDA's intervention in Guatemala, there are challenges ahead. The major challenge is institutionalizing SNER. At present, all rural extension agents are hired on an annual contractual basis, providing no stability for both the human capital and for the institution and agricultural services to the communities. USDA and Counterpart International are urging the Ministry of Agriculture to provide long term sustainability to the program through recognition of the best students graduating from the Rural Extension Certificate Program, via inclusion into the weak, but existing Civil Service permanent status employees of the Government of Guatemala.